

WHEN VICTORY BECOMES AN OPTION

**Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood
Confronts Success**

Nathan J. Brown

MIDDLE EAST | JANUARY 2012

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

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Summary

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood stands on the brink of an impressive electoral victory. After several months of suggesting it would check its own electoral ambitions, the Brotherhood plunged into politics with unprecedented enthusiasm, focusing all of its energies and impressive organizational heft on the parliamentary vote. Now, with the electoral list of its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, likely to gain close to (and maybe even more than) half the seats and perhaps cabinet positions as well, the movement is entering uncharted waters.

Brotherhood leaders often invoke the phrase “participation, not domination.” That old slogan may hold for the time being because the hazy and unsettled rules governing a country in transition make it difficult for any one actor to be in control. And, with the military continuing to exercise a firm grip, the movement will have a strong voice but hardly a dominant one. But the Brotherhood's ambitions have clearly edged upward. Seeing itself as deeply rooted in its own communities, offering a virtuous alternative to the corrupt system that governed Egyptians for so long and that allowed political, social, and economic power to be deployed for private benefit, Egypt's Brotherhood now seems to feel called into service by the nation.

Recognizing that its electoral strength may spark a counterreaction from other political forces, the Brotherhood is now calling not for a parliamentary system but for a mixed or semipresidential system. Though currently seeking to avoid full authority, the movement is hardly in a timid mood. It is focusing on the longer term: asserting a justifiably powerful claim to a leading role in the process of writing a new constitution. And the movement's leaders seem to want a democratic constitution above all else.

Indeed, it is not clear how much the Brotherhood's past decisions and behavior can continue to guide its future actions. Over the past few years, it has released a blizzard of very detailed policy proposals and platforms. If it is to be successful in government, however, the Brotherhood must start setting its foreign policy, economic, and cultural priorities. While the movement's appeal has always been strongly cultural, moral, and religious, there are few areas where it sets off fears more quickly than in this realm. As a result, the cultural agenda has been sidelined. But with the ultraconservative Salafis entering the political arena for the first time, the Freedom and Justice Party may be forced to choose between competing with them for the Islamist base and reassuring non-Islamist political forces at home and abroad.

Introduction

With two-thirds of the voting in Egypt's parliamentary elections complete, the electoral list of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the country's Muslim Brotherhood movement, stands on the brink of an impressive electoral victory. A parliamentary majority is very much within reach. A movement whose leaders spent years constantly reiterating the slogan "participation, not domination" to signal the limited nature of their political ambitions is now poised to claim cabinet positions and is asserting a justifiably powerful demand for a leading role in the process of writing a new constitution. Leaders who had to play by rules written by their adversaries for decades are now preparing to write their own new ones.

One year ago, about one-third of the movement's top leadership was imprisoned, the prospect of legal existence seemed chimerical, and sham elections had deprived the group of even a limited parliamentary voice. Now those same leaders spin out party platforms and proposals for economic recovery, meet with high-level foreign diplomats, negotiate with generals, organize occasional street protests when their claims are ignored, and prepare to assume a measure of political authority.

My own research on Islamist movements in the Arab world has focused on their operation in the semiauthoritarian orders that were prevalent until quite recently; while such political systems did allow some room for maneuver for opposition, even of the Islamist sort, they were carefully constructed to deny any possibility that top political positions would change hands as a result of an election. The book based on that research, titled *When Victory Is Not an Option*,¹ is being published at precisely the same time that the FJP is entering an era in which victory suddenly has become an option. The lessons of decades of semiauthoritarian politics are still very much on the leaders' minds, and the implications of electoral success remain unclear since the rules of the new order are not yet defined.

After a few months of hesitation earlier in 2011 (a much shorter period than I would have expected), the Brotherhood has embraced the possibility of a full electoral victory and indeed concentrated all of its energies on realizing it. The Brotherhood retains the same leadership and its formal positions have moved at most incrementally; it has not abandoned its general goals, legendary caution, and insistence on its status as a broad reform movement (rather than simply an electoral political party). But it is now entering uncharted waters,

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Now the dominant civilian political force in the country, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is poised to enter the halls of power. How did victory become an option? What does victory mean for the Brotherhood—what sort of political authority will it seek to achieve? And what will it do with its newfound—and until recently, unanticipated—success?

How Victory Became an Option: From Deliberate Steps to a Bold Leap

It is not hard to explain why so many of the FJP's competitors turned in such a disappointing set of electoral performances. The alphabet soup of opposition political parties that emerged in the semiauthoritarian orders of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak were thoroughly desiccated by the time of the January 25 revolution. Indeed, it was not really clear that they were either "opposition" (with many of them thoroughly co-opted) or "parties" (with only the Wafd retaining anything like a nationwide organization).

The formerly ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) was disbanded as an organization by a court infused with revolutionary enthusiasm, but those associated with the party of the old regime—derisively referred to as the *fulul* (remnants)—did enter some races. While some such figures were discredited as individuals, just as notable was the way in which the kind of local politics they represented worked poorly in the first postrevolutionary elections. Indeed, one of the surprises was how badly local bigwigs without party affiliation fared.

The parliamentary NDP bloc had never been a tightly disciplined party machine but, instead, a few national leaders joined by a collection of local figures who used their prominence to secure seats, sometimes bribing and bullying their way to victory in their districts. A manipulative regime and a series of constitutional court decisions had combined to give birth to a fairly localized set of parliamentary races in which NDP figures might have often competed against each other or those deprived of the NDP label might have run as independents and then been welcomed into the parliamentary party after victory. The new electoral system for 2011—in which two-thirds of the parliamentary seats are distributed according to party lists and the remaining seats are elected on an individual basis in larger electoral districts (ones that undermined a bit of the old, retail-style campaigns)—worked against that kind of politics.

And there were few new actors who could step into the gap. The various forces that participated in the revolution spent little of the ten months since their stunning victory in Tahrir Square party-building, with many of them eschewing party politics on principle and others focusing, instead, on the politics of protest rather than of party organization. Those who did turn their

attention to electoral politics complained that the elections came too quickly for them to organize properly, and in a sense they were right. But the task of building nationwide networks and constituencies can take many years and a delay of several more months would hardly have made much difference.

There were perhaps some missed opportunities—organized labor is undergoing its own set of upheavals but did offer some possibilities for building a working-class party that seem to have fizzled for the moment. The energies of a new generation of Egyptian middle-class youth infused with a strong voluntarist spirit might have been harnessed to spearhead the creation of some new political forms, ones that could provide a political base for a non-Islamist movement (especially if they could overcome a deep set of class divides in Egyptian society). Yet, again, that is a process that, if it ever occurs at all, would likely take some years to find effective electoral expression.

Thus it should be no surprise that the only new political actor able to storm onto the scene was the Salafi movement. With a network of organizations reaching throughout the country and a newfound interest in electoral politics, Salafi leaders found that their organizations lent themselves to campaigning with apparent ease. The extent of their success is striking—and their enthusiasm for the task is more remarkable still.

In such an electoral field, the ability of the FJP to reach for a parliamentary majority became a natural consequence of its own deep experience and nationwide presence as well as of the weakness of almost all its rivals. But why did a group of leaders who pride themselves on exhaustive discussion and study before taking any step (*kull khatwa madrusa*, “every step is deliberate,” they like to say) move so quickly from a modest set of electoral objectives to an expansive one? I expected such an evolution to take a few electoral cycles, not a few months.

In the period after the revolution, Brotherhood leaders reiterated their “participation, not domination” slogan and set a target of one-third of the Parliament. (Leaders did not explain where this target had come from, but interestingly, it was a direct carryover from the ceiling the movement had set under the old regime, where seeking more than one-third of the seats would have given it a veto over constitutional changes and thus, in its own eyes, been tantamount to seeking a seat at the table of political authority.) They also disavowed the presidency, though they reserved the right to throw their support behind a candidate from outside the movement, and even dismissed a leading member, Abdel-Moneim Abul-Futuh, when he declared his candidacy. By late spring, the movement’s ambitions seemed to be edging upward, as leaders suggested they would contest one-half of the races in order to secure their targeted number of seats. And when the campaign began, the Brotherhood’s FJP took a further step, entering almost all the races. Its candidates have generally made it to a runoff round; in that runoff, the FJP’s organization almost

always has pushed it over the top. Thus the party will either fall just short of a majority—or may (depending on the third-round results) actually obtain one.

In a literal sense, leaders can claim to have held close to their original pledge. It is not the FJP itself, they can assert, that will have secured majority status, but a host of parties, most of them non-Islamist, that have run as the Democratic Alliance coalition under the FJP banner.² When the new Parliament is seated, therefore, deputies from the FJP itself will still likely be less than a majority even if the party's electoral list crosses the 50 percent threshold. Yet even if this is true, the coalition is one that will be dominated by the FJP. Its Democratic Alliance consists of a group of small partners who will easily be dwarfed by the Islamists—and there will likely be enough ideological allies in the Parliament, and the Brotherhood's discipline is sufficiently strong, that the FJP will be able to assemble a voting majority when it likes.

I was able to see the evolution in the Brotherhood's approach through a series of meetings over the past year with Khayrat al-Shatir, the movement's deputy general guide, reputed to be the leading organizational and financial figure in the Brotherhood. He appears less in public than many other leaders and has not shifted from the Brotherhood itself to the FJP (as did three of the most publicly prominent members of the organization's Guidance Bureau—Muhammad Mursi, Essam al-Arian, and Mohamed Saad Katatni). But al-Shatir was sufficiently central to the movement that when the Mubarak regime wanted to rein in the Brotherhood in the wake of its strong showing in the 2005 parliamentary elections, it was he who was sent off to prison. When I met him for the first time in March of last year (shortly after his postrevolutionary release), al-Shatir repeated the “participation, not domination” refrain. I asked him if he thought the Brotherhood would ever seek a majority, and he said “of course.” But he went on to speculate that it might be some years—perhaps a decade, likely after his own retirement—before it would do so.

The second time I met him was in June, and he conveyed a slightly more assertive political stance. While I did not press him, I got the strong impression that he anticipated that the movement would be offered cabinet positions after the completion of the elections and that it would accept a measure of political authority for the first time in its history. And it was also clear that the movement's electoral self-confidence was growing. Much of its political behavior was deeply colored by the conviction that voting should occur as soon as possible because as soon as the electoral dust settled, the Brotherhood would be transformed from its position as one among many groups (and indeed one with uncertain revolutionary credentials) into the first among not-so-equal civilian political forces.

When I met al-Shatir in December—right as the second round of voting had begun—the atmosphere had changed once more. There was no more talk of a majority coming after his retirement. When I handed him a copy of the

Arabic translation of my book, with the title *Participation, Not Domination*, one of his associates immediately joked, “And now we are dominating?” Al-Shatir himself insisted that the Brotherhood had not broken its promise, and he ran through the set of arrangements and decisions that maintained the letter, if not the spirit, of the early postrevolutionary pledges to abjure a majority. But he clearly exuded the sense of responsibility one might expect of a movement about to assume a measure of political power. Gone were the days when he would insist that the movement had learned the lessons of Hamas’s premature (in Islamist eyes) electoral victory of 2006, or of the 1992 military coup that forestalled the Islamist FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) victory in Algeria.

The example of Hamas has weighed heavily on Islamist leaders in the region, but it seems to me that Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood may be following in the neighboring movement’s path. From the early 1990s up until 2005, Hamas members debated steadily (and sometimes quite vociferously) about whether they should participate in Palestinian Authority elections. Only after over a decade of internal deliberations did the movement turn toward participation, and then in a system in which the rules were stacked against it.

In a series of interviews after its upset victory, I asked Hamas members when they realized that victory was within reach and when a decision was made to pursue a majority. I received various answers to the first question, leading me to believe that many senior movement leaders realized weeks, if not months, before that victory was an option while others remained in the dark. But there were no answers to the second question—Hamas never seems to have made a decision or even had a serious internal discussion about the possibility of winning an election. Something of the sort may now be happening with what Hamas leaders refer to as “the mother movement”—Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood may be approaching the most fateful decisions of its history by taking a series of incremental steps, each one opened up by unexpected opportunities connected with the revolution (such as the release of its leadership, legal recognition for the FJP, and the favorable electoral law). The group shows some signs to outsiders of having been intoxicated (if the term can be forgiven) by its own success.

From inside the movement, however, there seems to be less a sense of succumbing to temptation and more one of accepting responsibility. Unlike Salafi movements, which pride themselves on their unswerving dedication to religious texts, the Brotherhood has always turned toward social engagement in any sphere that is open to it: its task is to lead its fellow citizens to finding ways to use Islamic teachings to improve themselves, their families, and their society. Seeing itself as deeply rooted in its own communities, offering a virtuous alternative to the corrupt system that governed Egyptians for so long and that allowed political, social, and economic power to be deployed for private benefit, Egypt’s Brotherhood now seems to feel called into service by the nation.

To movement leaders, now does not seem to be the time to shirk the burden that has been thrust upon their shoulders.

What is Victory? Winning an Election in a Military Dictatorship in Transition

Who Is Now in Charge?

But what is it that the Brotherhood is poised to win? A number of features of Egypt's transition process suggest that however many votes the Brotherhood attracts in the parliamentary elections, it will have a strong, but hardly a dominant voice, for the time being. "Participation, not domination" may continue to work for now because of the hazy and unsettled rules governing a country in transition.

Even as the FJP was winning seat after seat, the building where its deputies planned to sit was the site of street battles between demonstrators and security

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forces. And even as those subside, the role of the elected assembly will be murky. The Parliament has been stripped of a clear oversight role under the governing "Constitutional Declaration"³ issued by fiat by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in March 2011. Article 33 of the declaration states that "the People's Assembly will assume the authority to legislate and determine the public policy of the state, the general plan for economic and social development, and the public budget of the state. It will also oversee the work of the executive branch." But all the mechanisms of oversight—most critically those that required that ministers receive and continue to hold the confidence of a majority of Parliament—were removed

when the clauses on Parliament were carried over from the now abrogated 1971 constitution. Thus, the kind of oversight intended by the interim constitution is defined nowhere in the document, and the argument that it is up to the SCAF and later the president to appoint ministers without any parliamentary role is quite plausible. It might be that such ambiguity would be resolved in practice over time, but the document is supposed to pave the way for a new constitution within months, giving little time for practice and precedent to fill in its many holes.

The interim constitutional system does allow Parliament a voice in legislation, but the body must share lawmaking authority with the SCAF. Only in the matter of electing the members of the assembly that will draft Egypt's new constitution are the Parliament's paper prerogatives unchecked. But the SCAF shows very strong signs of having woken up to the implications of having ceded

authority over naming the constitution's drafters, and political actors wary of the likely Islamist role in the Parliament have been scrambling for months to convince the SCAF to wriggle out of the provisions of its own transition plan.

The Brotherhood's general stance in this context is clear. It is not shy about insisting that the people's voice be honored and that the Parliament should be allowed to play an oversight, legislative, and constitutional role, but it will likely hold the full extent of its fire for long-term rather than short-term issues.

Building a Coalition and Governing in a Constitutional Vacuum

In a parliamentary system, the FJP would have to take a definitive stance on its policies and alliances after an election by seeking either to rule itself or to form a coalition. But the Parliament's ambiguous oversight role will allow the Brotherhood to adopt a much more ambiguous strategy. The Brotherhood has suggested that its strong parliamentary showing should earn it some voice in political decisionmaking, but it has also shown signs of backing off from claims of forming a majority government. And that will let the party evade the task of formally assembling a coalition. In short, what the Brotherhood seems to seek—for the interim period—is a leading voice in forming the cabinet without a full transition to a parliamentary system that includes clearly defined government and opposition parties. Its short-term preference might therefore be to reach out to all actors for informal alliances and create a system that operates as much as possible by consensus.

The Brotherhood's constant claims of wishing to build an inclusive coalition—whether formal or informal—however sincere, are likely to be far more difficult to realize, as the FJP's performance has intimidated its rivals and led them to regard the Brotherhood's strength as their biggest concern. Its leaders now insist that assumptions that there will be a natural Brotherhood-Salafi alliance are unfounded. They may be telling the truth because on a societal level, the Brotherhood and the Salafi movements regard each other as rivals rather than partners. A Brotherhood attempt to align with non-Islamist forces (an approach leaders probably prefer for now) may be a good way to send reassuring signals, but the polarization in Egyptian politics that has set in over the past year coupled with some liberals' and leftists' strong fear of Islamists (a fear that has driven some straight into the military's arms) would make such a task much more difficult.

Thus the new Parliament will be an important platform for the Brotherhood on which to present its vision and perhaps to pursue selected legislative projects, but it will not be a place from which it will be able to govern or forge clear alliances. That may be something of a relief for the transition period,

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since the feeling that “the burdens of Egypt are too big for any one party” still informs Brotherhood thinking. And with the Parliament likely to be the target of a flood of demands and grievances—Egyptians have learned to press their political agendas in a host of new ways over the past year—an ability to spread responsibility will be politically useful.

In a little noticed shift, the Brotherhood has signaled that it wishes to continue such a position of shared responsibility beyond the transition period. Its ability to dominate the Parliament would force it to take full responsibility if Egypt's constitutional order, when it is finally laid down next year, is a parliamentary one as the Brotherhood had said it favors. Thus recognizing it may have a majority in that Parliament, and that other parties may be reluctant to join it, the Brotherhood is now calling not for a parliamentary system but for a mixed or semipresidential system—one that would have the Brotherhood share power after the military returns to the barracks, at least until it runs its own presidential candidate (which it continues to insist it will not do in the elections the SCAF has promised by June). In a sense, the idea of dominating Parliament and perhaps the cabinet, while leaving the presidency to others, would amount to following at the national level the same strategy the movement has adopted in some professional associations, where it dominates the board but leaves the position of chairman to an independent.

The Brotherhood may be showing signs of seeking to avoid full authority for the time being, but it is hardly in a timid mood. In our most recent meeting, Khayrat al-Shatir indicated that while the Brotherhood will not spend its political capital on matters that are not likely to have long-term impact (such as specific cabinet positions in the interim government), it will take a strong stand on those involving Egypt's political reconstruction, such as writing the constitution. It was a highly calculated move, therefore, when the Brotherhood called on its supporters in November to demonstrate in the streets against a draft document of “constitutional principles” presented by subsequently deposed deputy prime minister Ali al-Silmi. This plan was poised to impose unwelcome choices on the Parliament regarding whom it could appoint to the 100-member body that will draft the constitution. It would have also enshrined a strong permanent role for the military. In that sense, it sought to control who would write the constitution and force on the drafters specific provisions connected with military affairs.

While the attempt to impose such a document has been suspended for now, al-Shatir seemed to imply that if it were revived, the Brotherhood would play political hardball again. Indeed, he replied to a question from my colleague Marc Lynch about the military that he did not think that Egypt could follow the path of Algeria in the early 1990s or of Egypt in 1954, the last time the Brotherhood had to deal with a military regime. In Algeria, the military intervened to prevent an Islamist electoral victory. And in Egypt, the Brotherhood found itself suppressed with Egypt's supposedly interim rulers laying claim to

permanent positions. In 2011, al-Shatir explained that the Egyptian people, unlike their grandparents or Algerians of the early 1990s, have an assertive mentality that would lead them to demonstrate until such an attempt was defeated. The remark struck me less as a sociological observation and more a pledge that the Brotherhood will take back to the streets if it senses attempts to deny it the fruits of democratic triumph.

Al-Shatir also suggested that the Brotherhood's pledge to leave the presidency to others will hold only if the current road map is observed. If there were an attempt to rob the new Parliament of all its powers, or to delay presidential elections (as was suggested earlier), then the Brotherhood might consider its policy of self-restraint no longer appropriate.

The Brotherhood's Constitutional Vision

If the constitution is the movement's red line, then what does it insist on seeing in the final document? There have been ambitious efforts by scholars over the years to sketch out an Islamic constitutional system drawing extensively on a millennium of Islamic jurisprudence on political issues, but to date the Brotherhood has shown little interest in them. Instead, it seems to wish to ensure that the existing provisions for religion in the constitutional declaration (adopted verbatim from the 1971 constitution as amended—a document that as a whole owes more to France, Belgium, and even Yugoslavia than to Mecca and Medina) are maintained. But those provisions are either symbolic or depend for their interpretation and implementation on the normal institutions of the Egyptian state, such as the Parliament and the Supreme Constitutional Court. Even the provision that “the principles of the Islamic sharia are the main source of legislation”—a clause carried over from the abrogated constitution into the Constitutional Declaration, and one that the Brotherhood wants to see replicated in the 2012 document—is hardly self-enforcing. Its implementation has been left to the Parliament, the courts, and the executive rather than to any body of religious scholars. The Brotherhood might push more robust language for al-Azhar⁴ and some accounts suggest that it may seek to add a new symbolic clause declaring the Egyptian political order as “civil, with an Islamic reference,” a verbal formula pioneered a few decades ago by the group that split off from the Brotherhood to form Hizb al-Wasat (the Center Party). But by and large, the Brotherhood does not seem to be focusing the bulk of its political energies on entrenching more robust language on Islam.

Most of what the Brotherhood seems to want is a democratic constitution—one that allows popular sovereignty to be exercised through Egypt's existing institutions, with more effective provisions for enforcement, separation of powers, and the protection of political rights. In that respect, the Brotherhood's constitutional priorities are little different from those of most of the civilian political forces that are generally described as “liberal,” “leftist,” and “progressive.” The latter group of forces is sometimes divided over economic issues (with

those on the left wanting to stress social justice provisions far more strongly, in contrast to the Brotherhood's comparative liberalism) and a few non-Islamists have been flirting (or more) with attempts to entrench a permanent role for the military due to their growing fear of the Islamists.

Those differences aside, when the constitution is written, most of its clauses may be fairly easy to get down on paper, involving closing loopholes in the 1971 constitution, strengthening the Parliament and mechanisms of horizontal accountability, and robbing the presidency of its ability to control most institutions of the Egyptian state. The Brotherhood will likely be quite comfortable with this approach, since it is very optimistic—apparently with good reason—about its ability to pursue its agenda through existing institutions, especially the more responsive they are to majority will. There is no need for it to rebuild the Egyptian state from the ground up in order to pursue its Islamicizing agenda.

And if the Brotherhood gets what it wants in constitutional terms, what will it do when, for the first time, it can work through, rather than against, the state apparatus?

Moving From Opposition to Government? Preparing to Use the Instruments of the Egyptian State

The Brotherhood's critics have charged for years that the movement is long on rhetoric and short on specific policy proposals. That may have been true in the past. And there are, to be sure, remaining "gray zones," but they are broad and ideological in nature and have not precluded the movement from developing detailed policy proposals in many areas.⁵ Over the past few years, the Brotherhood has released a blizzard of policy proposals and platforms that are almost painfully detailed and represent a very studious effort to cover enormous areas of public affairs.

The Brotherhood may be better prepared for assuming authority in some areas than any of its sister movements. When Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, it had to move quickly from being a partly underground movement excluded from large parts of public life to being a governing party. When Ennahda re-emerged in Tunisia in 2011, its own leaders admitted they were not quite sure who all their followers were.

Members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (and, perhaps just as important, sympathetic intellectuals and professionals), by contrast, are sprinkled throughout the country's universities, free professions, private sector, and even many state institutions. The old order could be very harsh in combating the Brotherhood. There were areas in which the government seems to have made

an effort to screen out Islamists—likely the military and security services, and perhaps the diplomatic corps as well; Islamists are rarer in the judiciary but can still be found; they are very numerous in the free professions. But any comprehensive attempt to root out the movement was abandoned forty years ago. Thus the Brotherhood has a well-established presence in many spheres, which has given it an impressive ability to tap deep expertise as well as access to a network of specialists in many different fields.

As a result, the Brotherhood’s vagueness is only an issue in some areas. For other spheres the problem is its commitment to far too much detail: the Brotherhood has been much more successful at listing its programs than prioritizing them. In practice the FJP will have to make some choices and set some priorities if it finds itself in a position to implement some of its ideas.

Foreign Policy—Where the Vagueness is Greatest

The Brotherhood’s vagueness is at its greatest—and is actually increasing—in the area of foreign policy. Indeed, it is quite likely that the Foreign Ministry is the position the FJP is most likely to work to avoid, at least in the short to medium term. Instead, the movement will likely defer to the presidency, the diplomatic corps (in Egypt, still seen as a nonpartisan and professional institution), and even the security establishment.

It is not that the Brotherhood lacks interest in foreign policy issues. When it expresses itself, it participates in the generally populist and nationalist flavor of foreign policy debates in Egypt—suspicious of U.S. intentions in the region, viewing Gaza as a humanitarian issue, and opposing Israeli policy in terms that range from the critical to the histrionic. But the Brotherhood also has a long-term, almost visceral dedication to the Palestinian cause, dating back almost to the movement’s founding, that casts it not simply as an Egyptian or an Arab issue but also as an Islamic one. At the same time, the state that the Brotherhood seeks to help steer has a peace treaty, diplomatic relations, and economic ties to Israel. And as unpopular as Israel is among Egyptians, there is no enthusiasm for a return to the series of wars that ended in the mid-1970s.

In a literal sense, the Brotherhood’s stance on treaties, including the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, is clear—international agreements must be respected but they must be honored by both sides; they can also be renegotiated if one side feels that the terms no longer serve its interests. This formula allows the movement to present itself as a responsible actor, respectful of international law and practice but also insistent that Egyptian interests and values inform policy. And it allows it to hint that it would reconfigure Egyptian-Israeli relations if given the opportunity. But the Brotherhood has not explained why, or even clearly if, it regards Israel as having violated the terms of its treaty with

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Egypt, nor does it remind its followers that any renegotiation must be mutual. When I asked one very frank member of the Brotherhood if he detected any change in the movement's thinking on the issue, he said he definitely did—that Brotherhood leaders increasingly viewed Israel from the perspective of the Egyptian state rather than the more parochial one of a religious movement, but that past rhetoric and the feelings of the movement's grass roots placed a limit on public expressions of the evolving view. In such an environment, avoiding foreign policy seems to be the wisest path—that is, assuming that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute can hold still or be ignored.

While Hamas—which has a strong pull on the Brotherhood's loyalties—now seems to wish to keep the calm, the matter is not completely in the movement's hands nor is its quiescence likely to be permanent. Additionally, the pressure to relax border controls between Egypt and Gaza will be strong. Without responsibility for foreign and security policy for now, the Brotherhood might be tempted in some circumstances to let its rhetoric fly. In the event of a major flare-up, Brotherhood leaders would likely find it hard to hold their tongues.

The Brotherhood is also ambiguous on international human rights instruments. The emphasis on human rights (and specifically political rights) has loomed much larger in the movement's rhetoric over the past decade. An earlier generation of leaders would have insisted on grounding any talk of rights within an Islamic reference; today's leaders have no trouble eliding between sharia-based rights and human rights. But the party's platform⁶ does implicitly acknowledge a tension between the two: it takes a dim view

of the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” and the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” on religious grounds, calling for their “review.”

Egypt's leaders will also have to figure out how to place themselves in a rapidly changing regional environment.

There is a sense that the Brotherhood is riding the crest of a regional wave—one in which Islamist-led cabinets may soon stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. And there is no doubt that today's Brotherhood leaders are quite self-confident and feel themselves on the right side of history. They do watch developments in Tunis and Turkey. But they are very much inclined to see the “mother movement” in Egypt as an exporter rather than an importer of ideas and expertise. And the Egyptian movement has generally been more inward rather than outward looking, deferential to other movements to make their own evaluations of their domestic scenes.

The looseness of the Islamist affiliation has been on clear public display over the past few months. Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Egypt last summer and spoke of the virtues of “secularism.” In Egyptian terms,

Egypt's leaders will also have to figure out how to place themselves in a rapidly changing regional environment.

this led some to question his Islamist credentials; the Brotherhood showed immediate discomfort with his language. Tunisia's Rached Ghannouchi was far less blunt, but he also spoke on a visit to Egypt in terms of a far less intimate relationship between religion and state than is the Brotherhood's wont. When Ghannouchi visited Washington, he hinted, fairly diplomatically,⁷ that the Egyptian movement might be well advised to keep its political appetites in check.

The ideological differences, distinct domestic political environments, and the focus on internal issues suggest that it is hardly likely that a green curtain will descend across North Africa. There is a loose set of sympathies and affinities that unite the various movements (though the ties between Egypt's Brotherhood and Hamas are perhaps stronger than this general rule might suggest) that might be far more fruitfully compared to the connection between Bill Clinton and Tony Blair than that between Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker.

Economics: Blending Market, Social Justice, and Virtue

The Brotherhood has been far clearer on economic issues, both with regard to its general orientation and specific policy proposals. But here the problem is too many practical ideas, not too few. The movement has drawn on experts in various fields to sketch out proposals, including attracting investment, pursuing infrastructure development, and building a more appropriate educational system, but given fewer indications of its priorities. In terms of general orientation, the Brotherhood has two strong impulses: first, it seeks to protect property rights and a market economy; second, it also feels that the state has a strong obligation to look after its weaker citizens. The position on what might be called "Islamic economics"—the attempt to build financial institutions and economic enterprises that are fully compliant with sharia-based legal norms—is a bit less clear, but the movement's strong inclination now seems to be to provide a protective legal and regulatory environment for such private efforts without pressing a conversion to an entirely Islamic economy for the whole society.

Underlying the movement's economic views is a conviction that the old order was run on the basis of corruption at all levels: crony capitalism at the top seeping down to lower-level coping mechanisms of those left out of the scramble to exploit state resources for private ends. What the Brotherhood offers as a remedy is virtue. It proffers a feeling that if honest and competent people are placed in high state positions Egypt can harness its citizen's abilities, skills, and pockets of wealth in a manner allowing for healthy economic development. To be sure, honesty in administering economic matters is always welcome, but it is difficult to believe that a culture of corruption can be erased overnight or that integrity by itself is a solution to Egypt's woes. The Brotherhood has few immediate solutions to Egypt's looming economic crisis, some of which was

brought on by the uncertainty associated with the revolution itself. Nor has it provided much guidance on how it will sort out priorities among its various programs and proposals.⁸

Culture and Morality: A Question of Priorities

The Brotherhood's appeal has always been strongly cultural, moral, and religious, and it continues to stand for its vision of probity, modesty, and morality in public life. But like other Islamist movements it has also come to realize that there are few areas where it sets off domestic (and even international) fears more quickly than in the cultural realm. Caught between a desire to demonstrate to its foot soldiers that it is committed to religion and to reassure its critics that it works only through peaceful and gradual persuasion rather than imposition and force, the politicization of the Brotherhood over the past year has led to a clear, even explicit, decision to postpone any cultural agenda. The FJP is anxious to show Egyptians that it can govern, that Egypt's most pressing problems relate to the economy and public security, and that the Brotherhood has qualified

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people within its own ranks or can pull in technical experts from outside the movement. It seeks for now to offer competence, technocratic administration, and probity rather than an end to moral laxity.

But the presence of the Salafis may complicate the Brotherhood's attempt to postpone the effort to Islamicize Egyptian public life. Their electoral success demonstrates that their conservative stances have widespread political appeal. There are clear indications that the Brotherhood's leaders have concluded that their Islamist rivals' showing means that they need to reassert their own presence throughout Egyptian cities, towns, and villages and reclaim the religious constituency they regard as naturally theirs. What is far less clear is how politics will fit into that effort. Much of the work can be done through organizing in the social and religious realms. But how will the Brotherhood react if a Salafi parliamentarian thunders about a perceived offense to religion in Egyptian public life? Will it stand on the sidelines, feel forced to join, or even work to outbid Salafi leaders?

Salafis themselves are something of a wild card. They are entering a sphere where they have little experience, but they seem ready and willing to participate fully. Shortly before the second round of voting, one Salafi leader criticized another for making controversial statements and he moved Salafi arguments into a new realm: Rather than complain that his rival had misinterpreted a religious text or quoted a less reliable hadith, he claimed that the outrageous remarks had cost the Salafis parliamentary seats. Never before has a lack of political tact been a sin in Salafi circles.

There is a precedent for integrating Salafis as normal parliamentary actors, but it has occurred in a country which few Egyptians have been accustomed to consider a model. Salafis of various stripes have competed in Kuwaiti parliamentary elections for a generation. Their participation seems to have had two effects. It has led to some uncomfortable compromises on matters of principle. For instance, most Kuwaiti Salafi deputies will deal with female members of Parliament and ministers—even those with uncovered hair—despite their consistent opposition to full political rights for women and insistence that women in public spaces dress in accordance with more traditional conceptions of modesty. At the same time, Kuwaiti members of Parliament from the Brotherhood-inspired Islamic Constitutional Movement have often found themselves in parliamentary alliances with Salafis and even more often saddled with responsibility for controversial stances, while the Brotherhood's inclination might be to take a more pliant or gradual approach.

An assertive Salafi bloc in Parliament may place the FJP deputies in an awkward position, forced to choose between competing with the Salafis for the Islamist base and reassuring non-Islamist political forces at home and abroad. And there is reason to suspect that Salafi deputies will relish putting their Islamist rivals in precisely such a position, in order to demonstrate that the Brotherhood (as many Salafis frequently assert) is really about politics, not religion.

The Movement and the Party

Brotherhood movements throughout the Arab world focus considerable attention on the relationship between the broad organization—one that focuses on religion, society, charity, and education of its own members—and the political party it might form—one which seeks to win races and participate in governing. These discussions are often missed by outsiders who view the movement as a monolithic whole or analyze it as a power-seeking organization. But the discussions within the movement are lively, because Brotherhood movements are very insistent that they are not simply about political power but about a broad reform agenda only a portion of which they wish to pursue through the political process. And they worry at times that an overly enthusiastic embrace of politics might suck the movement into making compromises.

Under the Mubarak regime, the Egyptian Brotherhood's choice was made for it: A political party was out of the question. The slogan “participation, not domination” could be viewed as much as an ambition to be allowed a role as it was an unnecessary promise that they would not win an election.

For now, the Brotherhood has reacted to the opportunities presented in postrevolutionary Egypt in two contradictory ways. First, it has plunged into politics with unprecedented enthusiasm, focusing all of its energies and impressive organizational heft on the parliamentary elections. Nonpolitical

activities, as critical as they might be, can wait for the moment. Second, it has placed its political party on a very short leash indeed⁹—appointing the FJP's leaders, approving its platforms, and even deciding which movement members should move over to the party. The aim may be ensuring that the party will not become so engrossed in politics that it loses its soul. But over the long term, the new opportunities will raise the same challenges that have faced other broad movements (such as socialist or Christian democratic ones) operating in democracies. The Brotherhood has never had to coordinate ministerial decrees with sports teams, reading circles, and schools before. Its respect for expertise is such that it prefers to allow some autonomy to those who lead its various spheres of operation, but it has never been faced with a situation in which its political wing was so prominent—not merely domestically but even internationally.

In the Egypt of 2012, the Brotherhood's leaders will have to answer questions that have never been asked before. They can refer back to the epistles of their founder Hassan al-Banna for inspiration, but not for practical guidance on detailed questions. Instead, Donald Rumsfeld's proclamation that "Freedom is messy" will be just as helpful a lesson to remember.

Notes

- 1 Nathan J. Brown, *When Victory Is Not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).
- 2 Under the new electoral system, electoral alliances are permitted but must select the name of a currently recognized party.
- 3 See “Supreme Council of the Armed Forces Constitutional Declaration,” Guide to Egypt’s Transition, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2011/04/01/supreme-council-of-the-armed-forces-constitutional-announcement>.
- 4 See my earlier Carnegie Paper, “Post-Revolutionary al-Azhar,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2011, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al_azhar.pdf.
- 5 See Nathan J. Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Marina Ottaway, “Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Grey Zones,” Carnegie Paper no. 67, March 2006, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp_67_grayzones_final.pdf.
- 6 “Election Program,” Freedom and Justice Party, www.scribd.com/doc/73955131/FJP-Program-En.
- 7 Rached Ghannouchi: the FP interview, posted by Marc Lynch, Foreign Policy.com, December 5, 2011, http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/12/05/ghannouchis_advice.
- 8 See the forthcoming Carnegie paper by Ibrahim Saif and Muhammad Abu Rumman.
- 9 “The Muslim Brotherhood as helicopter parent” posted by Nathan J. Brown, ForeignPolicy.com, May 27, 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/05/27/the_muslim_brotherhood_as_helicopter_parent.

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